JACK KEROUAC:
WRITER, RELUCTANT ICON

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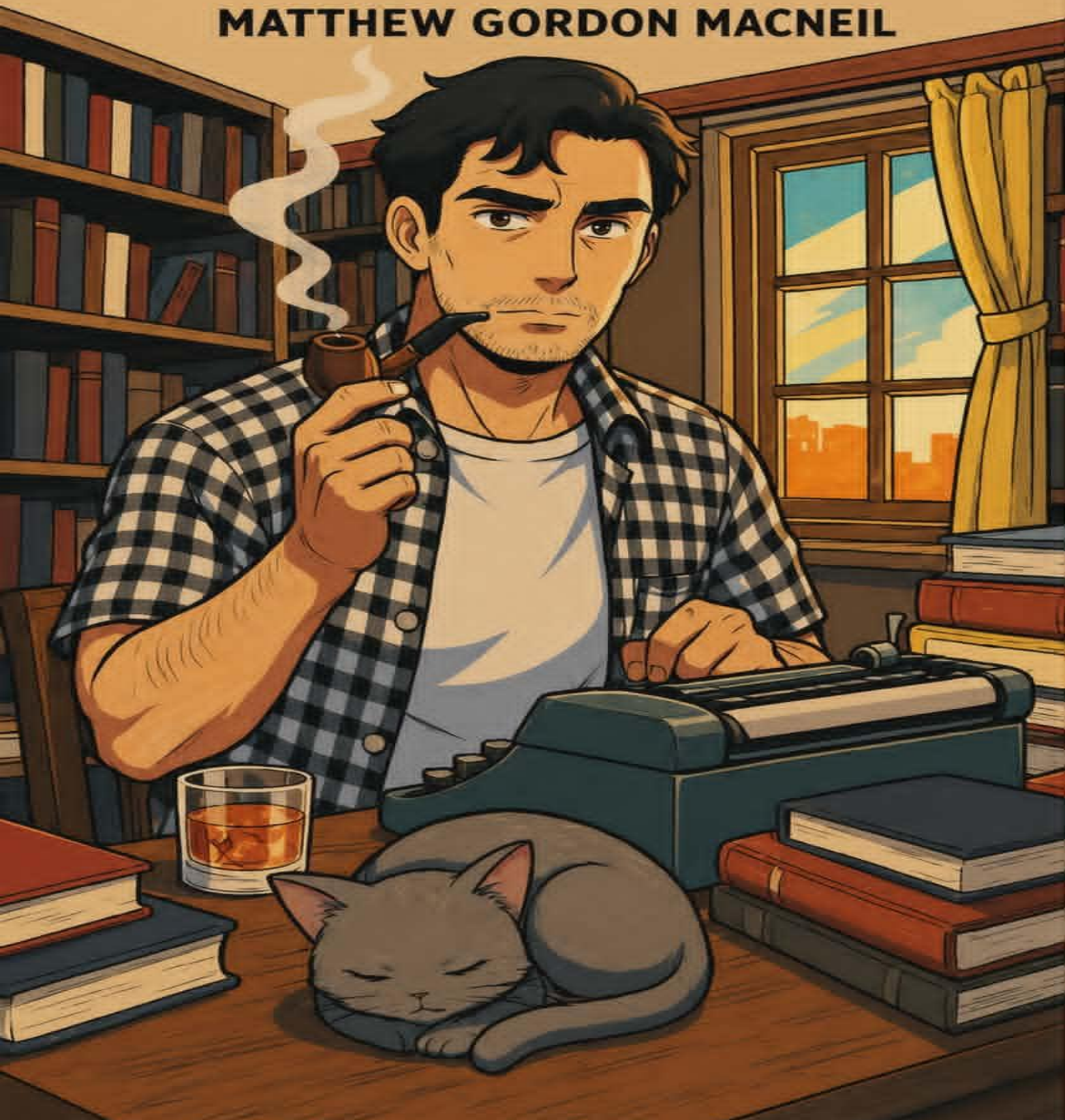

Jack Kerouac: Writer, Reluctant Icon

By Matthew Gordon MacNeil

Chapter 1: Jack's Family, Early Childhood And Teenage years

The French presence in what is now the United States stretches back to the early days of the colonialization the continent, when the explorer Robert de La Salle and others

traversed the then unexplored Great Lakes region and the Mississippi river and the settlement of what is now Maine, then part of the colony of Acadia.

Soon Missouri and Louisiana followed, becoming colonies of the vast and powerful French Empire. Hundreds of Frenchmen and women flocked to the New World to begin new lives away from the slums of Paris or Orléans, to give their future generations lands of their own, not owned by rich Lords, but by them and them alone.

Out of all the colonies France owned, the greatest was its namesake, New France, situated in what is now the Canadian province of Quebec. Founded by Samuel de Champlain in 1610, New France soon grew into a prosperous and thriving colony of the French Crown, its people developing their own distinct cultural identity.

These people, becoming known as Canadiens or Canadians, became major players in the coming century when France and Britain, rivals since the Medieval period, fought war after bloody war for control of the continent.

From New York to Quebec to the shores of Isle Saint Jean, modern day Prince Edward Island, the two global powers waged countless battles and uprooted many families, both British and French. It was during these colonial wars that the first French Canadians found their way to America, either

voluntarily or being captured either by British soldiers or their Native American allies, the Iroquois Confederacy.

Then, in 1776, when the thirteen colonies joined together and revolted against the British Crown, creating the United States of America, they sent an invading army into Quebec with the hopes of converting the French Canadians to their cause.

Leading the charge in this was Benjamin Franklin, who wrote letters prior to the invasion, urging the French Canadian people to rise up against their British overlords who only thirteen years before had won control of New France after the conclusion of the Seven Years war, the final large scale conflict between France and Great Britain to determine the fates of their respective colonies.

Some French Canadians, such as Pierre Ayotte, Philippe Liebert, and Clement Gosselin, answered Franklin's call and took up arms with the Revolutionary forces, joining in their attacks on Montreal and Quebec city, but by and large the populace of the province, while not lovers of the British, were thankful that they respected their Roman Catholic faith and traditions and allowed them to keep them, whereas the Americans, many of whom were hardline Protestants, would not be so open minded and kind towards 'Papists'.

Therefore only a handful of fought for the cause of American independence, and after the war ended and the United States

was officially recognized in 1784, they received land grants in the newly founded States, sowing the seeds for new generations of French Canadian Americans.

While these soldiers and those who preceded them were the first French Canadians in America, they were small in number and many assimilated into American society quickly or over a few generations. It was not until the middle and late 1800s, when there was a massive influx of Canadian immigration, both of Anglophone and Francophone, that large communities of French Canadians began popping up in New England and other U.S States.

Many of these found work in the lumber mills and logging camps, doing the hard back breaking labour of cutting or hauling logs, working in dangerous conditions alongside Scottish, Scots Irish, and native Irish immigrants.

While rubbing elbows and forming friendships with their fellow immigrants, the French Canadians, called Canucks by many Americans, both as a term of endearment and an ethnic slur, kept their language and culture alive in their communities, called Little Canadas, scattered throughout New England, including in Lowell, Massachusetts, a city which is vital to this story.

America offered a chance for a better life for many Quebec families, but it also gave them things they would have been

better off without, such as prejudice and bigotry, both for being predominately Catholic and for their French heritage.

Several different slurs came into use to describe the French Canadians in these years, such as Pea Soapers, referring to their habit of eating pea soup often. Frogs, Coon asses, Greasers, and of course Papists. The insults and hatred didn't just come from the dominate English society either, but from other minority communities, and in turn, as unfortunate as it is, the French Canadians held prejudices against other groups.

Despite the difficulties and the bigotry they faced, the French Canadians and their English speaking Canadian cousins made new lives for themselves in the U.S, establishing successful businesses, families, and neighbourhoods.

One of the families who migrated from Canada to the New England region of the United States during these years was the Kerouac Clan, headed by their patriarch Jean Baptiste Kerouac and his wife Marie Clementine Bernier, both from long established French Canadian families in Quebec.

According to family tradition handed down to Jack from his father Leo, one of the sons of Jean Baptiste and Marie Clementine, the Kerouacs traced their ancestry back to Brittany, France, and before that to Cornwall and ultimately to Ireland, where they had been nobility.

A strong believer in his Celtic blood, Jack once commented that it was partially from this side of his family that he received the gift of storytelling, and took great pride in his ancestry.

How much of this oral account of his family is true is up to each individual reader to decide, but for my part, knowing how oral traditions can last many generations, and many centuries, I do believe it.

The earliest ancestor of Jack's that can be determined with any certainty is Alexandre Louis de Lebris de Kirouck, a minor Baron from Brittany who received land grants in Quebec from the King and settled there in the 1730s.

Once in Quebec Alexandre's descendants, including Jack's line, married women of the Mohawk tribe, becoming potato farmers and business owners, settling seamlessly into French Canadian life.

By the time the 19th century rolled around the Kiroucks, having long lost their nobility status, were common French Canadian peasants trying to eek out a living in their province, struggling like most to make ends meet and yearning for a better life.

Jean Baptiste Kirouck, seeing the steady stream of his countrymen crossing into the U.S, decided his own family's

future would be better on the other side of the border and in 1890, a year after Jack's father, Leo Alcide Kirouck, was born, the family moved to New Hampshire where Jean Baptiste found work as a carpenter in the town of Nashua. It was in their new home that their surname changed from Kirouck to the familiar Kerouac.

Jack's mother's side, the Levesques, originally came from Normandy, descending from Robert Levesque who immigrated from Normandy to Quebec in 1674 as a carpenter, and like the Kiroucks, the Levesques soon became well established in Quebec society.

Jack's mother, Gabrielle Ange Levesque, was born in 1893 in Saint-Pacome, Quebec. Like Leo's, her family joined the migration to the U.S soon after her birth and she would grow up in a Little Canada in New Hampshire, where she and Leo spoke French as their first language, kept their ethnic identities strong, and in Gabrielle's case, stayed involved with the Catholic Church throughout childhood right up into adulthood.

As a young woman in 1913 Gabrielle moved to Nashua where she took up work at odd jobs and working in factories, earning her way on her own and slowly integrating into the French Canadian community there. Even at such a young age (she was twenty) she was more mature than many of her

contemporaries, noted for being serious, thrifty with money, wearing simple clothing, and devoutly Catholic.

At the same time Leo was working a printer's apprentice in the city, writing articles and learning how to use the typeset and how to bind pages, and it is while learning the printing craft that he met Gabrielle, and the two hit it off, courting for the next two years before marrying in St. Aloysius of Gonzaga Church, the Catholic church founded by the French Canadians of Nashua in 1871.

Not long after their marriage the newlyweds left Nashua and headed to Massachusetts where they settled down to raise a family in Lowell, finding a place in its French Canadian enclave.

The Kerouacs welcomed their first child, Francois Gerard Kerouac, two years after settling in Lowell on August 23rd, 1916.

Gerard, as he was known in the family, was from the start a sickly child, prone to illnesses and long stretches in bed, nursed by Gabrielle and at times by Leo. Like his mother, Gerard, as much as his young mind was able to comprehend such things, became a devout Catholic, relying on his faith to help deal with his various health problems.

After Gerard Leo and Gabrielle had a second child, a daughter,

two years later on October 25th, 1918, whom they named Gabrielle Caroline, though her nickname throughout her life would be Nin.

And finally, several years later, on March 12th, 1922, the Kerouacs welcomed their third and final child, a baby boy they named Jean Louis de Lebris Kerouac. To his family, he would forever be known as Ti Jean 'Little John,' but to the outside world, in time, he would become known as John Kerouac, and then later still, Jack Kerouac.

The Kerouacs lived on 34 Beauliu street in the French Canadian quarter of the city, surrounded by other immigrant neighbourhoods filled with Irish, Poles, and Greeks, all of which, while some prejudice existed (as is usually the case in any place), got along well. One Greek family, the Sampas, would come to play a prominent role in Jack's later life.

Leo, having completed his apprenticeship, started up his own printing business and rented out a shop in the city where he printed fliers for local businesses and continued to write his own articles.

At home the Kerouacs spoke only French, English being the language of 'outside', used only when necessary. As a consequence Jack knew no English and didn't begin learning until he was six and already in school.

Gerard and Jack, despite the age difference, got along well together, Gerard taking his role as eldest sibling seriously even at his young age.

In later years in his forties Jack recalled how Gerard used to take him outside and the two would look up at the sky watching the white clouds go by, counting them one by one.

In other instances Gerard went for walks and took Jack along, always making sure the younger brother held his hand so he wouldn't get lost.

But the biggest lessons Gerard taught him, Jack said, were to be kind to animals (something he took to heart, being a great animal lover throughout his life) and to remember God in whatever he did. How much the younger brother understood, being only four, is hard to guess, but it is clear Gerard had a great impact on him throughout his life, including in his writing.

While these happy memories stayed with Jack, the most important, and gut wrenching, memories were of Gerard's final years, years filled with pain and agony with little relief in between.

As mentioned, the eldest Kerouac child was born sickly and as he grew older his illnesses multiplied and grew. When he was nine, in 1926, Gerard contracted rheumatic fever, his heart,

joints, skin, and nerves becoming inflamed.

Now a relatively minor medical condition, but back in 1926, especially for a poor family just trying to get by as the Kerouacs were, rheumatic fever was a serious issue, and Gerard, always dealing with minor discomfort, began experiencing horrible pain.

Tended to by Gabrielle night and day, with help from the Sisters of Saint Louis de France, the nuns who ran the parochial school the boy attended, Gerard slowly wasted away until barely anything was left of his little body.

During the final hours of his life, on June 2, 1926, Gerard, according to Gabrielle and the Sisters, received a vision of the Virgin Mary. She appeared above his bed, the boy telling his mother and the nuns, who prayed and wept at his bedside.

Finally his heart gave out and Gerard Kerouac passed away. His death, even though he was only four when he died, left an permanent impression on Jack, both spiritually and emotionally. For the remainder of his life he would believe his elder brother was a Saint, holy and pure, and he also felt, sadly, he could never measure up to how good Gerard had been.

These feelings weren't helped by Gabrielle who, most likely unconsciously, kept holding her eldest up as the pinnacle of

virtue to her youngest, telling him how he must be as good, as great as Gerard, not meaning to make Jack feel small or flawed in comparison, but leaving the feeling all the same.

The death of Gerard also gave Jack anxiety, making him fear sleeping alone for years afterwards, afraid something might happen to him and take him away as well. As a result, as many children do, he resorted to sleeping with his mother for comfort and safety.

Without his elder brother Jack began taking more interest in Nin, the two surviving siblings playing together and going to the movies on Saturdays, able to get in to see whichever picture was currently playing thanks to the fact that Leo printed off the programs for the owner, a nice 'benefit' brother and sister made sure to take advantage of often.

By six, Jack was sent to St. Joseph Brothers school, where he was taught by the Sisters there, and it was at St. Joseph brothers where he was introduced to the English language for the first time.

And he struggled to understand it.

To many who've read Kerouac's works, it may seem hard to believe there was a time he did not know English, given his mastery and use of it was, in this author's opinion, excellent. But his first language was, and remained, Canadian French,

and it took years for Jack to get a grip on English, only feeling comfortable speaking it in his teens and even as an adult he felt lacking, never believing he could speak it as well as a native speaker.

Throughout Jack's childhood the family moved about Lowell, moving due to his father's financial troubles caused both by the Great Depression of the 1930s, and Leo's habit of gambling, worsening their money problems, and it left Jack with a feeling of fondness for all of Lowell, never having one place he could remember growing up in completely, but hopping from house to house, neighbourhood to neighbourhood, in search of stability.

Things grew worse when Leo, not content with gambling as a coping mechanism, turned to alcohol, spending the few dollars he did make from his business on booze and the track, leaving Gabrielle and the children without much income to buy food, clothing, and other essentials.

By the time Ti Jean was ten the family moved to Pawtucketville, another French Canadian neighbourhood in Lowell, and it is here, more than any other neighbourhood he would live in before or after, that he felt most at home.

While in Pawtucket the children socialized and made friends with local kids, but the parents did not mix much with others. Gabrielle, always the homemaker and caregiver, spent most

of her time cooking, cleaning the house, or making sure Jack and Nin did their schoolwork.

When not concerned with the home, she found solace in the church, going to Mass regularly, often taking Jack along with her where the young boy sat transfixed by the sights, sounds, and smell of the rituals, his eyes finding the Cross where Jesus lay crucified, the lamb of God who's blood was shed for mankind's sins according to traditional Christianity.

The message was powerful, leaving a long lasting impression Jack's mind. The figure of Jesus, as man and as the Word of God and God himself, would play a vital role in his life. While he might stray from traditional Catholicism, mixing it with Buddhism as a young man, he never abandoned the Christian faith, keeping Jesus and what the Cross symbolized close to his heart.

Like many boys his age in his ancestral home of Canada, Jack played hockey in winters on Lowell's frozen streets and on the Merrimack river that flowed behind the city. In the summer he played the all American game of baseball, developing a lifelong fascination and love for the sport, which became the basis for his own fantasy baseball league which he continued to play through his life.

But the game Jack came to enjoy most, and grew skilled at, was football, which he played with his friends George

Apostolos, Henry 'Scutty' Beauliu, and Jack's best friend throughout his childhood and teenage years, Sebastian 'Sammy' Sampas.

In Jack's early teens Leo, finding extra work at a bowling alley, soon rose to become its manager, and this allowed the Kerouac household to begin to accumulate some much needed income, and, thankfully, the senior Kerouac was able to curb his drinking and gambling habits so that, while not altogether eliminated, he was able to resist temptation enough to provide for his wife and children.

In one of the lapses back into vice Leo, deciding to go bet money on the horse races, took the twelve year old Jack along, both to spend time with him and to get him out of Gabrielle's hair for awhile.

Jack fell in love with the races, both admiring the speed and agility in the horses themselves, and how the betting system worked.

Hitting Junior High School in 1935, Jack and his friends spent their afternoons, since Gabrielle and Leo were out of the house working and didn't want the boys inside unsupervised by adults, hanging around a Greek neighbourhood called Dracut.

Here he played baseball with his friends, walked along its

roads looking at the farms and farmers, talking about their teenage worries and problems, discussing their favorite radio shows, movies, and pulp stories.

An avid reader of pulp stories, Kerouac bought up the magazines whenever he could, particularly The Shadow magazine. Along with the pulps Jack enjoyed comic books and the Sunday funnies, a reading taste he shared with Leo.

By thirteen he had begun writing his own stories, starting off drawing comic strips and filling in the word balloons, before moving on to filling notebooks with short stories and his first attempts at novel writing. Inspired by the pulps, these early stories were fantasies, westerns, and other genres usually covered in the magazines he enjoyed.

The biggest event in his teenage years came at fourteen when that winter the Merrimack river flooded and the waters surged up the banks into Lowell, destroying houses and businesses alike.

One of the businesses affected was Leo Kerouac's printing shop which, while not as lucrative as before, was still part of the family's income. The water seeped through the door and wrecked the equipment, everything needing to be thrown out.

The loss of the print shop forced Leo to leave Lowell to search

for work (which he thankfully found) and put a dent in the family finances for awhile, but this didn't dampen Jack's spirits much. Discovering his love of writing early, he continued blazing through notebooks, filling them in on impulse, stories, poetry, comic scripts, he wrote it all.

By sixteen Kerouac had developed into a handsome young football star on the make, playing for his High School team, winning praise for his skill, and he also fell in love for the very first time.

The girl who caught his attention was Mary Carney, who came from an Irish American family and was by all accounts quite pretty. Jack was, in a word, smitten and she liked him too.

The romance was an on and off again sort of relationship. Jack, dreaming of bigger things beyond Lowell, by now convinced writing was what he wanted to do with his life, wasn't sure being with Mary was the right decision. She was a good person, loving and supportive, but also traditional.

For Mary, the ideal life was one of marriage, several children, a stable household, the American Dream in a nutshell, and she wanted to stay in Lowell. An understandable and pleasant goal to have, but not one Jack was certain he wanted (or could) pursue.

The two continued dating until High school ended and Jack,

earning two football scholarships from Boston College and Columbia university, decided to leave Lowell to pursue higher education.

In the end, due in part to his mother's urgings and his desire to study at a prestigious school, Jack chose Columbia, but before he could attend there he needed to complete a year of prep school at Horace Mann in New York.

So, with reluctance, Jack ended things with Mary Carney and packed his bags for the Big Apple, arranging to stay with his mother's stepsister during his year at prep school before moving onto the campus at Columbia.

His year at Horace Mann, while he learned a great deal, was also one of embarrassment for him. Many of the students at the school came from wealthy or comfortable families, many of whom were Jews of various European ethnicities and Jack, while not overtly anti Semitic like his mother, did harbour some prejudices against Jews, but not enough to prevent him from making friends with individual Jewish people, a current theme throughout his life.

While at prep school Jack began reading more widely, picking up the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great 19th century American essayist and philosopher, and the novelist and naturalist Henry David Thoreau. In fact Jack was so amazed by Thoreau's descriptions of nature in his novel Waldon that he

contemplated abandoning college, giving up on society, and heading out into the great American wilderness to live a hermit existence and devote himself to writing.

Of course such flights of fancy did not lead anywhere. He remained at Horace Mann, continued to study, play football, and eat his bread and butter sandwiches for lunch nearly everyday (all he had), all the while practicing his writing. He was always writing.

In the school's magazine, The Horace Mann Quarterly Jack had his first published credit. A mystery short story he wrote called The Brothers found its way into the magazine's pages in the fall, bringing him a lot of joy seeing his work in print. In addition to writing pieces for the magazine Kerouac also cut his teeth working as a reporter for the school's newspaper.

While he was busy writing fiction and articles for the newspaper, Jack made sure to find time to socialize, pushing his natural shyness aside as best he could in order to do so.

One person he met during this period who became a close friend was Seymour Wise, an Englishman who came over to America a few months prior due to his father, rightly, believing war was brewing in Europe.

Seymour played an influential role in getting Jack into Jazz music, something up to now he had little experience with.

Wyse took Kerouac, very much still a 'country bumpkin' to many at the school, into Harlem where they sat in bars and Jazz joints listening to music and chatting with other patrons.

One band Kerouac enjoyed at this time was the Count Bassie band led by William James 'Count' Bassie, a Black pianist, composer, and organist from New Jersey. The sound of Jazz hooked Jack who was amazed at the sound, cadence, and rhythm of it all. It was here among the bars and people of Harlem where the seeds were planted for his later lyrical style, taking inspiration from Jazz and musicians like Count Bassie, Roy Eldridge, and others.

Doing well in both football and grades Jack graduated from Horace Mann in 1940 and went on to Columbia university where he looked forward to making a name for himself playing football and focusing on writing.

However, as life happens sometimes, things didn't go according to Jack's plan.

Chapter 2: Columbia, Marriage, and Neal

The bone broke clean.

Jack's first game for Columbia university football team saw him snap his leg, an injury which sidelined him for the rest of the season, effectively ending his university sports career before it had a chance to begin.

To make matters worse he came into near constant conflict with his Head Coach, Lou Little, a rough and no nonsense Italian American who, ultimately, didn't like Jack and ignored his requests to play.

The only consolation, if one could call it that, was that Kerouac used the cast and crutches he would need for the next six weeks to allow him to use the 'fame' of this injury to win sympathy from classmates.

The only truly good thing that came out of his broken leg was that it gave Jack more time to write and read, which he jumped on, filling his notebooks with private thoughts, stories, observations, and poetry. He read widely, Kafka, Whitman, and Saroyan, but his favorite writer at this time was a novelist from North Carolina.

Thomas Wolfe, from Ashville, N.C, had died when Jack was still just a boy in 1928, but before his death, and after, Wolfe was acclaimed as one of the best American novelists of the new century.

Wolfe's most famous work Look Homeward Angel was a fictionalized account of his own boyhood growing up in Ashville, using his family and neighbours as characters, only 'masking' them with fictious names, their traits and mannerisms staying completely the same.

The novel was a success, shooting Wolfe to the heights of literary fame and recognition, but it also caused an uproar in his hometown, the people outraged to be put up on display for the world to see, sometimes in an unflattering light.

Wolfe, stung by this rejection, continued to mine his own experiences for his work and wrote several more novels before his untimely death, though none quite as good in many minds as his first major breakthrough.

To Jack, Wolfe was near to perfect as a writer could hope to get. He idealized the man's style, so much so that he (indirectly) imitated it in his own work.

Around the same time he started reading Wolfe in earnest, Jack also met people who would, for the rest of his life, play a key role as his close friends. The biggest being Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, and John Clellon Holmes, meeting them at Hartly Hall, the first official residence built on Columbia's campus, and the man who brought them together was Lucien Carr, who himself met Jack through Edie Parker, an art student at Columbia and Jack's girlfriend at the time.

Allen Ginsberg, a Jew of Russian ancestry, was a poet and reporter for the university paper. He and Kerouac hit it off almost immediately, bonding over their love of literature and writing.

William Burroughs, who like Carr came from a wealthy family in St. Louis, Missouri, his family owning the Burroughs Corporation, was primarily of English descent and was a bit awkward and proper as befitting his higher class status.

Despite the differences in class Jack and Bill, as Burroughs preferred to be called, became friends, going on to collaborate on a crime novel called And the Hippos were boiled in their tanks a few years after meeting, though it never saw publication until recent years.

John Clellon Holmes, as serious about writing as Jack and Ginsberg,

hailed from Holyoke Massachusetts. Out of Jack's friends, Holmes was one who listened to him the most, even during his final years when alcohol took hold of Jack's life beyond any point of return, Holmes listened and cared for him, never giving up hope he'd recover.

Together the six of them listened to Jazz, read poetry and novels ranging from Kafka, Wolfe, Hemingway, to Tolstoy, Proust, and Louis-Ferdinand Celine, discussing the ideas and topics found within, and they talked about their own works in progress. At the time Kerouac was at work on a collection of short stories in the mold of Hemingway, which he would complete the following year.

By 1941 Jack, no longer held by the dreams and fantasies he once harboured about university life and being a football star (Lou Little refused to use him), decided the only natural course of action was to drop out of Columbia completely.

Of course, such drastic action didn't sit well with his parents. Leo, understandably, saw this as a stupid decision, one made on impulse and recklessness rather than his son thinking rationally and told him so. For her part Gabrielle too wasn't keen on the idea, trying to convince Jack to go back, but, ever stubborn and set on his own course of action, he wouldn't listen.

In order to make ends meet in the interim until he figured out his next move, Jack worked at a gas station, first as a mechanic, though when it became apparent to everyone he knew squat about vehicles he was quickly assigned to washing windshields and pumping gas, loathing the tediousness of the job but needing the income it gave him.

By this time, the summer of 1941, America, suffering the bombing of

Pearl Harbour by Imperial Japanese forces, had entered the Second World War which had already been raging in Europe and Asia for two years at this point. Young men and women from all walks of life, every ethnicity and race were answering the calls to serve their country, and Jack, ever the romantic at heart, began idealizing and romanticizing the war as a great heroic effort.

But, for the time being, he stayed out of the Service and continued to grind, working his hours at the Gas Station the rest of the summer and then, in the fall, returning to Lowell where his friends, Sammy and Alex Sampas, got their older brother, Charlie, a reporter for the city newspaper The Lowell Sun, to get Kerouac a job with him, which he did.

He wrote for the paper for two months, authoring a sports column which garnered some notice and Jack enjoyed the work to some degree, finally able to make a living as a writer, though not the type of writing he wanted. He wanted to write fiction, novels, and like before when he was with Mary Carney, he worried staying in Lowell for any extended period might harm that ambition.

So, to his father's chagrin, Jack quit the Sun and headed to Washington where the ever restless Kerouac found work on construction projects. On one of these projects, while hammering a piece of wood into place Jack heard a whooshing sound go past him, a short cry, and he looked down.

What he saw horrified him.

A man, working high above him, stumbled and lost his balance, falling off his platform and plummeting to his death below, his body broken

and shattered.

Shocked and upset by the accident Jack quit soon after, unable to handle the possibility, however minor it might be, of someone else dying that way.

He and Edie, still together, corresponded by letter back and forth, Jack telling her how unsettled he felt, that he knew he'd be drafted into the military, there was no point in worrying about it.

Returning to Lowell on the heels of the construction accident Jack and Leo got into an argument, the elder Kerouac tired of his son's Devil May Care attitude and demanding he take life more seriously, find a job, and put firm roots in a place.

Jack, for his part, while he complained to Edie of feeling unsettled, wasn't ready for the average life style most people found desirable, and told his father so, but the traditional Leo thought his son a fool to reject societal conventions.

Hurt by his father's anger and rejection Jack left Lowell in a hurry, going back up to New York where he stayed with Edie for a brief period before, purely on impulse, heading into the U.S army recruitment office and offering himself up for military service.

He was sworn in, but, unlike what he expected, he wasn't immediately sent to a military base for training, but was released back on the streets to await further notice.

Unhappy with this Jack went to the Coast Guard's office and enlisted there, getting finger printed and photographed. Yet, even as he was doing this, he started to feel scared. Trapped.

Letting his emotions take hold instead of calming himself down, Kerouac left the Coast Guard office and got plastered out of his mind that night, knocking back as much liquor as he could, until he finally passed out while trying to use the men's bathroom in a shabby bar.

Waking up the next morning beside the dirty toilet Jack, vision blurry and head splitting, got up and stumbled out of the bathroom and out into the cool breeze of a New York morning, letting the cold air sober him up a bit.

When his memories of the day before came back to him he panicked again, and this time his impulses took him to the Merchant Marine's office where he begged the desk clerk to give him a job on a ship, any job, he was willing to do anything so long as he could disembark that day.

The clerk signed him up and gave him the job of scullion, a servant who carries out menial tasks, and posted him on the SS Dorchester which was scheduled to sail out of New York that very day, its destination Greenland.

Calling his parents from the office Jack told them he would be gone for awhile, but neglected to mention where exactly he was going, and then, just like that, he became a sailor, joining the crew of the Dorchester an hour later.

The life as Merchant Marine, whether in the U.S, Canadian, or any other allied nation's service, was fraught with danger during the Second World War.

Merchant Marines suffered thousands of causalities, among the highest out of any branch of the militaries of allied countries, many losing their lives in the frigid waters of the Atlantic ocean during the Battle of the Atlantic, the longest battle of the war.

German mines and submarines were the killers, sinking many a ship and damaging others. It is only by sheer luck that Kerouac on his first trip with the Dorchester wasn't blown to bits.

One morning, while he was busy cooking breakfast for his crewmates, the Dorchester's escort ship spotted a submarine headed towards them. In a fight lasting an unknown amount of time the escort was able to destroy the German sub, saving both itself and the Dorchester from watery graves.

The mission to Greenland was a success and by October Jack was back on U.S soil, bracing himself to see his parents again. His father, he was sure, would be furious at his decision to enlist, and while this was initially the case, Leo's anger was cooled when a letter arrived from Columbia during Jack's absence, sent by Lou Little, asking for the younger Kerouac to come back to play for the football team.

Leo, excited for his son, eagerly showed him the letter a few moments after he walked through the door once back in Lowell.

Jack, for his part, wasn't nearly as thrilled but agreed to return to Columbia to see how things went, thinking that Little had changed his ways.

He hadn't. Whatever issue he had with Jack, he didn't play him when he went back, keeping him on the bench an entire game. Fed up with this treatment Kerouac quit afterward and refused to go back

thereafter, leaving Columbia for good.

A few months later Kerouac learned that the Dorchester had been sunk in the Atlantic, several of the men he'd sailed to Greenland with being among the dead. This revelation left him feeling sick. How easily he could've shared their fate had he not left the ship once back in the U.S.

Despite this upset, he later decided to join the United States Navy reserves as, having no firm plan for what he wanted to do in life besides writing , he thought serving his country would be a good way to spend his time until he wrote a novel that sold.

But Kerouac being Kerouac, mistrusting and disliking authorities, he didn't last too long before he realized what a mistake he had made. Only eight days in to his Navy service he found himself in the medical bay, diagnosed with Dementia Praecox.

What was really bothering him was the disciplinary model of the navy, how strict and demanding it was. Plus, as a loner, being around hundreds of other recruits all day long, without much, if any, time for himself, it nearly drove him crazy, which is exactly what he told the Navy psychiatrist.

"I just can't stand it. I like to be by myself,"

He said, and with that, along with taking notes of his attitude, manners, and IQ, the good doctor diagnosed Jack with Schizoid personality disorder, though one wonders how accurate this was as Kerouac, in order to 'get off the hook' of Navy service, played himself up, exaggerated his traits, but there may be some truth to it.

During these months (and his months as a Merchant Seaman) Jack worked on and completed his first mature novel entitled The Sea Is My Brother. Inspired by the men he knew on the Dorchester as well as his life in Lowell, the novel didn't live up to Jack's own expectations and he later gave up on finding a publisher for it, placing the manuscript in his archives and leaving it be.

For much of 1943 Jack partied with Edie and his friends in New York, getting wasted, attending Jazz clubs, smoking weed, doing dozens of different drugs with abandon, having little care for any possible long term effects on his health, physical or mental.

Amazingly, despite how much alcohol and drugs he took, and how many parties he attended, Kerouac always found time to write, mainly short stories and poetry. His vices never came in the way of his true passion, Jack always setting aside time to devote himself to practicing his craft and getting stories and poems done.

In the summer of the following year, on August 13th, Lucien Carr and an older friend of his, David Kammerer, were walking in Riverside Park on Manhattan island when Kammerer, infatuated with Carr since the former's teenage years in St. Louis, made sexual advances towards him, not for the first time (he had a history of stalking and harassing Carr)

Lucien refused, uninterested in David sexually, and Kammerer, tired of the rejection and being denied what he desired time and again, snapped, attacking Carr, quickly overpowering the younger man.

Panicking Lucien reached inside his pocket for a Boy Scout knife he carried from his St. Louis days and, with no other recourse, terrified of

being raped, he stabbed Kammerer several times in the stomach.

Kammerer fell to the ground writhing in pain, dying soon after. Carr, horrified at what he had done, knowing he had no other witnesses to back him up, tied Kammerer's body down with rocks and tossed him into the nearby river, running to Bill Burrough's place to explain what happened.

Burroughs, knowing Kammerer and how he pursued Lucien from St. Louis to New York, believed his story and took the pack of cigarettes Carr took off David, having the man's blood on them. He flushed the package down the toilet and advised his friend to find a lawyer to represent him before going to the police and explaining what happened.

Carr left Burrough's apartment after, but instead of heeding Bill's advice he found Jack and told him what went down between him and Kammerer.

Jack, earlier in the night, had told Kammerer where to find Lucien (David eager to find him) and so felt partially responsible for what ensued in Riverside. Against his better judgement Jack decided to help Lucien get rid of the murder weapon, taking the knife and dumping it into the river and burying Kammerer's glasses in Morningside park.

When Lucien finally turned himself in Jack was arrested as a material witness, and charged with disposing of evidence. Burroughs was thrown into jail on the same charge but his father, once he heard of his son being locked up, promptly paid the bail cost and Bill was free to go.

Jack, however, wasn't so lucky. His parents couldn't afford his bond,

and what's more his father, even if he could have afforded it, wouldn't have bothered, pointing out how it was Jack's own stupidity that landed him in the slammer.

Edie visited Jack in jail with her mother and through Mrs. Parker was offered a way out of his cell.

The Parker family would pay his bail, with no need to pay them back, there would be no debt.

The catch?

He needed to marry Edie.

Jack, wanting out of the pen and knowing this was his best shot, agreed, marrying Edie Parker with police officers as witnesses on August 22, 1944.

The newlywed couple left New York and moved to Michigan where they lived together alongside Edie's mother and younger sister in Grosse Pointe Park.

During this time Kerouac, feeling boxed in by the marriage and being surrounded by the Parker women, locked himself in the bathroom most days, taking the Bible, Proust, and his typewriter with him, reading and writing the days away, ignoring the shouts and curses of Edie and her mother.

Within two months the marriage fell apart, Jack turning out to be not much use as a husband. The couple separated, Kerouac returning to New York while Edie stayed in Michigan. The two managed to stay on good terms and they stayed in touch for the rest of Jack's life.

As for Lucien Carr, he was charged with second degree murder but convicted of manslaughter and served two years at Elmira correctional institute in Upstate New York before being released and going on to become a respected Journalist, but also an abusive husband and father, his troubled childhood and trauma from the Kammerer killing plaguing him the rest of his life.

Once back in New York Jack moved in with his parents, Leo and Gabrielle moving to the Big Apple earlier, and the three lived together (Nin was living on her own at this time) in the Ozone Park area of Queens.

It was here, in between parties and getting high, that Jack started work on what would become his first published novel, The Town and the City. Still heavily influenced by Thomas Wolfe, Kerouac based Town and the City on his own childhood growing up in Lowell and his early years in New York, contrasting the two worlds and the main character, Peter Martin's, struggle to find his place and to win glory on the football field.

Martin, like Kerouac, comes from a French Canadian background, and like Jack, finds himself attracted to New York's night life, of its freedoms and entertainments, but feels out of place, and seeks the simplicity he believes Galloway, the fictionalized name for Lowell, holds.

Lowell, or perhaps a romanticized version of it, would always hold a special place in Jack's heart. A part of him always wanted to settle down in Lowell, start a family and live a simple life, but he knew deep down he wasn't cut out for domesticity. It was why he ran from the marriage with Edie Parker, why he chose to cut things off with Mary

Carney.

To Jack, while domesticity was appealing, as American as apple pie as the saying goes, it wasn't in him. He wasn't built for it, having an inability to settle down for long with anyone.

For the next four years Kerouac would work on his novel, crafting it carefully, believing (wrongly) that to write good fiction one must go slow, take care with every sentence. It would take several more years before he found his own style and threw off the writing myths still current in literature today.

In 1946, through a friend named Haldon 'Hal' Chase, Kerouac was introduced to a man who would become one of his dearest friends and the star of his greatest novel.

His name was Neal Cassady.

Born in Salt Lake City, Utah, on February 8th, 1926, to an Irish American father, Neal Marshall Cassady, and German American mother, Maude Jean Scheuer, while his parents were passing through the city on their way to California, Neal Leon Cassady grew up in extreme poverty among the lowest of the low classes. The Cassadys, once Los Angeles didn't pan out, settled in Denver, Colorado, where the younger Neal would be raised.

His father was an alcoholic, often roaming the streets looking for his next drink, taking the young Neal with him where the boy would get into mischief and cause trouble.

Neal's mother passed away when the boy was ten, leaving him in the

sole care of his father and the elder Cassady, as much as he loved his son, was a poor role model, letting him do pretty much whatever he wanted whenever he wanted.

By fourteen Cassady was being arrested for stealing cars. At fifteen he was arrested again for stealing vehicles and shoplifting, and when he was sixteen arrested for fencing stolen property. His career as a criminal took a front seat in his life, school and education in general falling to the wayside.

And yet, in despite of this Cassady had a thirst for knowledge. He was an intelligent kid, just one prone to put his smarts into suckering people out of their money or cars than putting them to use in getting a school based education. He read whenever he could, studying literature, philosophy, and religion, and it is this craving for knowledge that brought Neal to the attention of educator Justin Brierly.

Brierly, a High school teacher who belonged to an old pioneer family in Colorado, was impressed by Cassady's intellect. Believing he was wasting his potential running the streets and committing petty crimes, the teacher pulled a few strings and got Cassady accepted into East High School where he taught, hoping this would turn his life around.

It didn't. Neal kept up his criminal activities while attending the school and eventually found himself in serious hot water with the law, serving a one year prison sentence. Brierly continued to support Neal through this time, but soon after, perhaps realizing the boy would never change, the teacher stepped back, leaving Neal to his own devices.

After being released from prison yet again in 1945 the nineteen year old Cassady married his sixteen year old girlfriend LuAnn Henderson, and by the following year the couple headed to New York where Neal's friend Hal Chase was attending Columbia.

Chase had shown Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg letters Neal wrote to him a year or so before he arrived, sparking their interest. To Kerouac, Neal came across an intelligent, if naïve, person, asking Chase to teach him about the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and all the other things Hal was learning at university, Cassady wishing to be as intellectually savvy as he was criminally.

At the time Jack met Neal he was still dealing with the separation from Edie, feeling guilty for running out on her and wondering if he made the right decision, and work on his novel was slow, both combining to make him feel miserable.

While spending time on Columbia's campus one day Jack received word from Chase that Cassady was staying over in Spanish Harlem in a small apartment with LuAnn. Hal asked if he wanted to meet him, and Kerouac jumped at the chance, so the two headed over, knocking on Neal's door.

When the door swung open they were greeted by a half naked Neal, behind him they saw a young girl on the couch scrambling to cover up her naked body, having mixed success.

Neal invited them in, sending LuAnn, embarrassed and half naked as she was, to make coffee in the kitchen while they got settled in the living room.

Neal led the conversation, Jack and Hal listening as he talked about

his sex problems, not caring in the least he just met Jack mere seconds prior. This was Neal, fully open with whoever he spoke with, never holding anything back. Jack was captivated.

To Kerouac Cassady resembled a younger version of Gene Autry, a popular actor at the time most famous for his western roles, right down to his western accent. Its fair to say Neal clicked with Jack right away, everything about the man intrigued him.

Once LuAnn brought in the coffee she sat on the edge of the couch next to Hal Chase and remained silent, not to happy (as one can imagine) at having two men see her naked and then be sitting down talking like nothing happened.

She stared off into space, ignoring the conversation happening between Neal, Jack, and Hal, thinking of (Jack later surmised) back home, how evil New York was, not giving them a glance or hello at all.

The three men chatted right into the night, Neal getting the alcohol out and the cigarettes, passing each around, sharing freely. LuAnn, once liquored up, came out of her shell, jumping right into the discussions. No one got any sleep.

In the morning Neal, stoned, drunk, and near ready to pass out, ordered LuAnn, equally hammered, to prepare breakfast for them and their guests. Surprisingly she managed and they all ate together before Kerouac and Chase stumbled from the apartment and back to their respective places.

A week would go by before Jack heard from Neal again, again through Chase as a go between. Cassady wanted to learn how to write, to tell his own stories and create his own art. He asked Hal at first to help

but Hal, not a writer, suggested he talk with Jack and see if he would lend a hand.

Kerouac, happy to be of help to his new friend, agreed almost immediately. Cassady, apart from LuAnn now (apparently they fought, she made up charges against him to police, and he ran before they showed up) was living on the street and so Jack sent a message along with Hal to tell him to pay a visit to Ozone Park sometime, he'd be happy to have him, not expecting to see him for a bit.

Not a day later, a few hours after supper, the Kerouacs got a knock on the door while Jack was upstairs working on The Town and the City.

Gabrielle answered it and when Neal asked for Jack she shouted up for him.

Jack came downstairs surprised to see Cassady.

"Hello,"

He said shuffling on the steps,

"Remember me? Its Neal Cassady. I've come to ask you to show me how to write."

"Where's LuAnn?"

Jack asked in turn.

"She whored a few dollars together and went back to Denver."

Knowing how his mother and father would feel at this intrusion so late at night, Jack invited Neal out for some beers at a local bar. This turned out to be a sound decision on his part as Gabrielle, seeing Neal in the half light, half shadow of night, determined on the spot he was

no good and wouldn't have liked having him staying any longer than he needed to.

At the bar, while they nursed their drinks, Jack told Neal that, really, the one true trick to writing was to stick with it. You needed to pursue it with all you had, like an addict on drugs, it needed to consume you until it became apart of who you were.

In response Neal brought up Schopenhauer's dichotomy and the two started discussing it, to which Jack later admitted in On The Road he really didn't know much about but went along with it to keep in the flow of conversation.

Neal, Jack claims, didn't know what he meant either, but it was endearing since it was clear he wanted to understand, wanted to be a true intellectual, not just some half assed pseudo intellectual who spews some wisdom from time to time, more out of luck than actual intelligence.

They enjoyed each other's company, becoming real friends from that moment on, but while things may have been going well for Jack at the moment, within weeks his world would be shattered.

His father was dying of stomach cancer.

Leo Kerouac, strong in body and mind, wasted away with the disease, Jack taking care of him in the final stages, watching as the doctors came in weekly to drain the fluid from his stomach.

Before he died Leo made Jack promise to always look after his mother, no matter what. Jack vowed to make sure she was well cared for, and Leo accepted his word.

On May 17th, 1946, Leo Kerouac died at his home from stomach cancer, and while many have said this freed Jack, it seems rather callous to say. While he and his father may fought, with Leo disappointed with how his son chose to live his life, he was still his father and Jack was crushed by his death.

Had Leo lived it is entirely possible that he, once he saw Jack's success, would have accepted his chosen path, bringing the two close again. Its easy to judge the man like many do, but few try to see it from his point of view, conservative and rigid as it was.

After his father's death Jack threw himself earnestly into writing his novel, spending long hours working on it, letting his mind get lost in his fictionalized Lowell, spending time in his memories, bringing his father to life again in his story.

Neal continued to hang around and even managed to get inside the Kerouac apartment even though Gabrielle felt the way she did about him.

One night, while Jack sat in his room writing, Neal, visiting at the time, peered over his shoulder.

"Come on man. Those girls won't wait. Make it fast."

"Hold on just a minute. Let me finish this chapter."

Once Jack finished he got dressed and the two hit the town searching for some women. Neal, not at all concerned with his marital status, led the way, charismatic and confident.

Hopping on a bus the two talked nonstop, much to the irritation of the other passengers. They talked about writing, Jack's specifically,

Neal asking him how he wrote so much, how he chose what to write about when there was just so much TO write about.

"Man, wow, there's so many things to do, so many things to write! How to even begin to get it all down."

Neal got so excited that people started looking at them like he was crazy. A 'nut', as Jack later recalled, but they didn't care, the two having a great time. Getting off the bus the two continued to look for women to pick up, but they had no such luck.

Instead, Jack took Neal to meet Allen Ginsberg and almost from the time they met the two had a connection.

Allen, a gay man struggling with his sexual orientation at the time, found Neal Cassady to be extremely handsome and fell in love quickly. Cassady, for his part, liked Ginsberg's mind and over the coming years, knowing Allen's feelings, would tease him and, sometimes, even sleeping with him, but he never committed to a serious relationship like Ginsberg desperately wanted.

After introducing Cassady and Ginsberg Jack didn't see Neal for awhile, the Denver native spending most of his time with Allen swapping ideas and absorbing his new friend's knowledge on various subjects, especially poetry and literature overall.

Jack, while he could have joined in, felt insecure around them, fearing he wasn't as 'up to par' intellectually so stayed away and kept to himself, focusing on his novel.

In time Ginsberg introduced Cassady to William Burroughs, a petty thief friend named Herbert Huncke, and Burrough's partner at the

time, Joan Vollmer.

The meeting with Vollmer was memorable.

Joan, a drug addict, was hobbling down Times Square high on Benzedrine and having hallucinations. To make matters worse Joan was carrying her baby daughter in her arms at the time.

Getting her safely to Bellevue the two continued on, Jack later hearing about this horrible episode and consigning it to memory for later reference.

In the spring, when Jack began hanging around Neal frequently again, the two mapped out a plan to head West, to see the country.

Jack, having been gone to North Carolina in the winter with Gabrielle to visit Nin and her husband, Paul Blake, was eager to get started but wanted to work on his novel more first. Neal, not wanting to wait, decided to head out on his own, Kerouac and Ginsberg having a meal of beans with him before seeing him off at the 34th Greyhound station.

In July of 1947, saving up fifty dollars from Veterans cheques he received from the government, Jack was finally ready to join Neal out West. His mother warned him against going, but Jack, young and believing writers needed experience, brushed her concern aside and set off on the road.

Prior to leaving Jack received a letter from an old friend he met at Horace Mann, Henri Cru, who now lived in San Francisco, telling him to visit and the two could get work working on ships.

Cru, son of French immigrants, had a secure job working in the engine

room of a freighter and told Jack he could get him in. Kerouac replied he didn't mind what kind of work he did so long as it provided enough for himself and his mother to live on until he finished his novel.

He believed that, unlike The Sea Is My Brother this current book would make it and earn him some badly needed cash, so didn't want the added stress of struggling to find employment while working on it.

Cru was living with a woman named Dianne Orin at this time and he figured Jack wouldn't mind getting to know her, even though he knew his friend had severe shyness on first meetings.

Agreeing to go, Jack said his goodbyes to his mother, tucked away his manuscript until he returned, grabbed notebooks and pencils and headed out for the West.

He hitchhiked some, getting picked up here and there by truckers, women, and men, until he reached the West.

Going to Denver Jack met up finally with his friends, Ginsberg, Neal Cassady, Hal Chase, and even another friend he didn't expect to see, Alan Temko, who was another Columbia student.

Like in New York Jack and the others partied, spending their nights getting high and drunk, Kerouac taking down notes the next morning while nursing hangovers. He soaked up everything, every little detail, piece of dialogue, and gesture someone made, all to use in his work.

The friends spent their days cruising around Denver, drinking, and even visiting the ghost town of Central City, getting up to no good.

Jack noted how hard pressed the common people were, the average workers he met while traveling. He felt sad for them, how life seemed

to always hold them down and no one cared. At the same time, rather paradoxically, he saw it all as beautiful. Life, to Jack, no matter how harsh, how cruel, how torturous, was beautiful and amazing. He loved every minute of it.

Once Denver grew stale for Jack he bid farewell to his friends for the time being and went to San Francisco where he met up with Henri Cru and got a job, as Cru promised, but not exactly what he was expecting.

Cru found Jack a job working as a night's watchman at a boarding camp for sailors, not working as a sailor himself as he originally planned. Still, Kerouac worked at the job and continued to record details in his notebooks, filling them up one after another.

The night watchman job grew stale quickly and so, once more Jack went on the road, grabbing a bus to Los Angeles to continue his travels in the West. While on this bus he noticed a beautiful Mexican girl, and as he noticed her she noticed him, giving him a radiant smile.

Summoning him his courage, pushing down his shyness, Jack got up and asked if he could sit down beside her, to which she agreed.

He sat down, trembling, nerves biting at him and to combat this Jack lit a cigarette.

"Where you going?"

"LA."

She said.

"That's where I'm going too."

Jack said, excited.

From there until the bus stopped the two chatted about their lives. Jack telling her about his life in Lowell, his father, his mother, sister, his writing. How this was his first time seeing the country.

The girl, who's name was Beatrice 'Bea' Franco, had been born in Los Angeles to Mexican immigrant parents, who worked as seasonal pickers to get by. In fact it was what they were still doing, her whole family, by the time she met Jack.

Married to a man named Albert Franco and having a baby son with him, Bea ran away with their boy as Albert grew abusive, hitting her often for the slightest of causes. Leaving her son with her parents, she searched for work and now, after failing to find much, she was on her way back to them disappointed and angry life had come to this.

The two talked all the way to LA. It must've been quite the sight. A French Canadian kid traveling, seeing all he could see, and an Mexican American woman who dealt with the harshest cruelties life had to offer. The two were world's apart in terms of language, culture, and ethnic origins, but they clicked well, soon becoming a couple.

Once the bus stopped in LA the two got a hotel room together and decided that Jack would accompany Bea back to where her family lived in Sabinal to meet everyone.

In Sabinal Kerouac met Bea's siblings, parents, and her son. He watched the pickers, nearly all Mexican and Mexican American, slave away in the blazing Californian sun for meager pay.

To add insult to injury the labourers lived in run down shacks for

homes, their employers giving little care for their living or working conditions. But, despite this hellish existence, Bea's family and the other pickers made the best out of it, joyful and treating Jack as one of the family immediately.

Like he had done everywhere else Jack wrote down his observations at night in Bea's family's shack, noting how green and beautiful the California countryside was, but he couldn't escape how cruel life could be, especially to people of minority groups, it was similar to the discrimination his family faced when they came from Canada.

Working with Bea's brother Ricardo, called Ricky, and his friend Ponzo, Jack helped collect manure from local farmers for Ponzo's manure business. They'd go into the farmer's field with shovels, collect all they could, and then sell it to others who needed it for their farms.

It was a messy, and smelly, job but Kerouac kept with it for awhile, enjoying his time with Bea and Ricky.

Trying his hand at cotton picking, Jack signed up to work a shift, getting three dollars for hundred pounds of picked cotton.

He worked alongside a family originally from Nebraska who's grandfather came to California during the Great Depression looking for work, finding it in the cotton fields.

For much of that time they lived in ragged tents, living on the poverty line fighting to survive. Now, Jack noted, they lived in decent tents, but tents all the same. Their lot in life had improved by inches, not miles. But they smiled, laughed, and made the best out of their situation just like Bea's family. Their biggest dream at the time of

meeting Jack was to buy a trailer for them all to live in.

Bending down to pick cotton Kerouac started to work, only to discover he knew fuck all about picking cotton, taking minutes to take the white ball from the bed whereas the others could do it in a second flat. On top of that his fingers began to bleed, but he enjoyed the experience. He took breaks when he felt the need, resting his body on the brown earth of the fields, listening to the soft steps of his fellow workers, the rustle of the cotton stocks as they picked them clean.

Bea, also working in the field, put Jack to shame with her speed of picking and it left him feeling embarrassed. It didn't matter she grew up like this, having been picking the white stuff since she was a child herself, it made him feel foolish.

In all Jack spent fifteen days picking cotton, always behind Bea and the others, until finally, back hurting and realizing he couldn't live like this, he figured he needed to go back North.

He said his goodbyes to Bea and her family and took a bus back towards home. Stopping in Pittsburgh, he hitchhiked to New York, getting out at Times Square.

Here he got a quarter off a preacher he met in the street, waving down a taxi and finally reaching Ozone Park and Gabrielle. Home at last.

Once back at home Jack threw himself into his novel again, putting his notebooks aside to use for another project later, and he typed away for hours.

In the ensuing years Jack would hit the road again, this time with Neal

in toe, venturing all across the West from Texas to Wyoming, Montana and many other places, all the while dutifully taking down notes of the place they saw, the conversations they heard, and of course the people they met.

Returning home in 1948, Jack finally finished The Town and The City, sending it first to Thomas Wolfe's publishers, Scribners, with the hopes that Wolfe's legendary editor, Maxwell Perkins, would accept and work on the book. However Perkins had died in 1947, and in any case Scribners rejected the manuscript.

Stung by this rejection Jack didn't know where to turn next, but Allen Ginsberg took up his friend's cause, asking one of his former teachers at Columbia, the English professor, poet and literary critic Mark Van Doren, for help in getting Jack's work published.

Van Doren came through for Ginsberg and got Jack a meeting with Alfred Kazin, a scout for Harcourt Brace. Kazin, a Jew of Russian and Polish ancestry, was well known for his literary criticism, his reviews appearing in numerous magazines and newspapers, and if anyone could get Jack's novel accepted by a publisher, it would be him.

Kerouac, however, failed to make the interview but Ginsberg again helped him out by getting him another meeting, this time with New Yorker editor Edward Stringham who, after meeting Jack and liking him, set up a meeting for him with the editor in chief of Viking Press. The novel was rejected.

In the end Harcourt Brace, based on Kazin (who did end up reading and liking the novel) recommending it and the editor, the legendary Robert Giroux, enjoying it too, comparing it favorably to Wolfe's

work, a compliment that surely made Jack happy. Giroux offered Jack a one thousand dollar advance for the novel on the condition he cut it down in length to reduce production costs. Kerouac, excited to finally get a publisher, agreed to the changes and cut it down, a painful but necessary process he believed.

It took months to satisfy Giroux's conditions, Jack revising and reworking the novel over and over again, a grueling task he came to loathe and one he felt was unnecessary, having come to believe a story, novel or a short piece, should be left as is, the raw first draft being the best draft.

On March 2 1950 The Town and the City was published, Kerouac deciding to use 'John Kerouac' as his author name in order to sound more American. Several reviewers gave the novel good reviews but critics in the New Yorker and the Saturday Review rated it poorly (as they would continue to do with Jack's later work).

In financial terms the book was not successful, selling few copies and Jack receiving no money as his royalties did not exceed his advance, meaning all the money the book made went directly to Harcourt Brace.

Left with a bad taste in his mouth with his first publishing experience, and broke to boot, Jack did the only thing he could do.

He went right back to writing.

But this time, fed up with all the bullshit, all the literary nonsense he adhered to and which got him nowhere, Jack decided to write his own way, how he wanted to tell a story, and thus was born his Spontaneous Prose style.

Spontaneous Prose, to put it simply, meant to write whatever came to mind, writing fast, writing clean. No revision, no cutting to please editors.

By the time Jack was beginning to develop his own style he married Joan Haverty in late 1950. Joan, much like Edie, spent her time around Ginsberg, Burroughs, John Holmes, and other members of what would become known as 'The Beat Generation', and through these connections met Jack.

Within two weeks of knowing each other they married, moving into an apartment together in Manhattan where Jack went to work on what would become his most icon book, On The Road.

In order not to be interrupted by changing paper in the typewriter every time he finished a page, Jack got the idea to tape pages together to create a long, continuous 'scroll' he could insert into his typewriter which would allow him to write without any interruptions, an unheard of technique until then.

For three weeks Jack burned through his scroll, writing from morning till night, taking small breaks here and there to eat and sleep. The original novel had no chapters, no paragraph breaks, it was one long continuous story Jack let pour out of him onto the page, enjoying every minute of it.

Once the book was complete Jack hopped up, rolled up the scroll and called Robert Giroux, excited to share what he was convinced was his master work.

Giroux invited him over to his office and when Jack arrived, scroll under arm, he presented the manuscript to the editor, flinging it

across the office, letting it roll out over the floor.

Perplexed at the shape of it, Giroux picked it up and started to read. He liked it, but pointed out how it needed to be edited, cleaned up and chapters put in so readers would be able to understand what was happening. Jack wasn't having any of that.

He was adamant that the manuscript not be touched. When Giroux asked why, Jack replied because it was dictated by the Holy Ghost.

In time, beaten down by rejections and notes from editors that the novel needed to be edited, Jack gave in, but only a little. He gave it chapters, put in paragraphs, and changed the names of the characters from their true names to fictional ones, but he did not change the content.

Even so, it took Jack seven long years to publish the scroll, during which time he wrote numerous other books and became a follower of Zen Buddhism.

Chapter 3: Fame. Glory. Decline.

Like his marriage to Edie Parker, Jack felt boxed in with Joan Haverty. It wasn't that he didn't love her, he did in his way, but the pull of the road, traveling and spending time with his friends was stronger, and it made him feel trapped.

The marriage lasted eight months, in which time Jack got Joan pregnant, though he (with justification, she was unfaithful, as was he, numerous times) didn't believe it was his child and refused to acknowledge it.

Joan gave birth to Janet Michelle Kerouac on February 15th, 1952 in her hometown of Albany, New York, and sent word to Jack he was now a father.

But Jack didn't believe a word of it, refusing to acknowledge Jan as his offspring. It didn't help matters that Gabrielle, who Jack lived with in order to keep his promise to his father, kept poisoning his mind against Joan and the child, putting her down, telling him she was a whore, that the baby girl wasn't his. Already convinced, his mother's reinforcement solidified his belief and it was only in the last few years of his life before he changed and accepted Jan, but by then it was too late.

Soon after leaving Joan, on a hot summer night, Jack spotted a young Black woman sitting on a bench with one of his friends, Anton Rosenberg. Caught off guard by her looks, Kerouac walked over and introduced himself.

The woman, Alene Lee, who was half Black, half Native American, had known of Jack before, having done work typing up Allen Ginsberg's poetry and listening to Ginsberg tell her about him and how good his work was, but this chance encounter was the first time she met him personally.

The three of them walked to a bar down the street and here they conversed late into the night, Jack and Alene doing much of the talking, Anton just along for the ride.

It wasn't long before the two began dating, Alene taking Kerouac to the Jazz clubs she enjoyed, enriching his experience with the musical genre. A part of Jack, whether one wishes to call it racist or not, was fascinated with being with a Black woman, having never been in a long term relationship with one, only one night stands up to this point, but besides her race he found her mind intriguing, her carefree spirit enticing, and couldn't get enough of her, always wanting to be around her.

Before meeting Alene Jack had been working on the ships again, but got paid off before setting off on a trip to Kobe, Japan due to issues with other crewmates, and now with a new girl on his arm, he was eager to keep his feet planted firmly on solid ground.

Though hot and passionate at first, like with all his relationships with women, the one with Alene eventually cooled, Jack's restlessness and depression over not being able to publish his work eating away at their relationship until, like Joan, Alene thought it best to leave him. In response Jack did what he always did. He wrote, got high, drank, and wrote some more to ease his pain.

The relationship with Alene gave Jack the plot for his novel The Subterraneans where he wrote about their love in great detail, even giving explicit information which, when Alene read it years later, embarrassed her (understandably so).

A year later, in a sort of spiritual crisis, Jack picked up the Buddhist Bible by Dwight Goddard, an American writer who had studied Buddhism in Japan in a monastery and went back to the U.S determined to spread the Buddha's teachings to the West, his book going a long way in doing so.

Already conditioned into believing life, or the world in general, was evil and suffering part and parcel of the human experience via his Catholic faith, Jack saw in Buddhism a new way of understanding, and coping, with the hells and torments of being human.

Taking up Zen Buddhism, one of the most prominent branches of Buddhism in Japan, Jack immersed himself in the Buddhist traditions, finding parallels with Christianity in some respects (which is to be expected, as Christ studied in India in his supposed 'Lost Years' and learned under the Brahmins) and even equated the Buddha with Christ, seeing in him another Christ figure.

Through his interest in Buddhism and its teachings he met Gary Snyder, an American Buddhist writer who, like Goddard, spent considerable time in Japan learning about Zen and how

to implement it into an individual's life.

The main difference between Kerouac and most other Buddhists is that he never abandoned the Cross. However powerful the Buddhist scriptures and teachings were on Jack, and they did mean a great deal to him, he never stopped believing in Christ or the Bible. Jack believed in a literal resurrection of Jesus and in his blood atoning for the sins of humanity, though he didn't believe Jesus was the only path to salvation or Heaven, but his own preferred path.

Kerouac and Snyder travelled together, spending many nights outside under the stars talking Buddhist philosophy, about life, how society was undergoing a shift and how they felt they fit in to it all. Jack, still only having his first novel under his belt, wanted more than anything to be a great writer. He dreamed of being like Thomas Wolfe.

He wrote for its own sake, without question. His love and passion for writing and the written word was unmatched, but, like many writers who write out of love, there existed still a vanity, a desire to be recognized and to be known as great.

While travelling with Snyder and living with his mother in Ozone Park, Jack wrote and finished his next novel Doctor Sax, a work based on his childhood in Lowell. He admitted in a letter to Allen Ginsberg that he worked on the novel while often high on weed, letting the words flow where they

wished, follow behind and not rewriting, never rewriting, he was done with that myth.

After he finished Doctor Sax Jack tackled a new project a few months later, again based on his life in Lowell, this time featuring his first serious romance with Mary Carney.

Fictionalized as Maggie Cassidy, which also gave the book its title, Jack outlined their relationship from start to finish, leaving out no details, conversations, by necessity needed to be invented given so much time had past and at the time Jack hadn't begun to record his experiences like he would in later years.

Mary Carney, still caring towards Jack, didn't mind him writing about her, though she did wish he kept some information private, and when he became famous, she denied requests for interviews save for a few, respecting Jack's privacy up until her death in 1993.

By the summer of 1955 Jack, in a bid to battle his deepening depression over struggling to publish any of his works, went down into Mexico to visit Bill Burroughs. To get away from it all for awhile. With Bill he smoked weed, got drunk (as always) and met a Mexican prostitute he took a fancy too.

The young woman's name was Esperanza, a drug addict who hung around with Burroughs and Kerouac while they cruised

about her hometown looking for thrills and more dope.

The contradictions between his Buddhist and Catholic beliefs and sleeping with a woman of the Night wasn't lost on Kerouac, but his need for sex and female company overrode this area many times, much to his shame and embarrassment.

These experiences would go into his short novel Tristessa where he renamed Esperanza as Tristessa and wrote about her life and circumstances.

Esperanza, according to Kerouac, was an innocent woman, forced by a hard life of poverty to sell her body in order to get by. Her addiction to morphine, rather than being a choice she made which turned out to have unfortunate consequences, becomes something she didn't control, forced upon her by life and her living circumstances.

He renders Esperanza and her life in a empathetic, if naïve, manner, and it is clear that her living conditions did drive her to the only option available and whatever drugs she may have started using to cope, she deserves our sympathy and compassion, as do all who find themselves in dire poverty with no hope in sight.

Leaving Mexico and Esperanza in the fall of 1955 and heading to Florida where his mother was staying in a house in College Park, Jack worked on and finished Trisstessa and The Dharma

Bums an account of his travels and discussions with Gary Snyder.

Then, in 1957, Jack's dreams became reality.

On The Road was accepted by Viking Press and published. Jack thought the sale would give him enough money to buy his mother a new fridge, help with their finances, but little else. He was just happy to be published again.

But On The Road became an overnight sensation, propelling Jack into the American limelight, turning him from an unknown writer into a pop culture icon, something he never dreamt of or wanted to be.

Jack wanted literary fame. He wanted to be respected as a great writer among other writers and people who loved books, but with the publication of On The Road, its tales of adventures on the open road inspiring thousands of young people, men and women alike, to travel themselves, he became a popular figure in American society.

And, predictably, he also became a target for conservatives who thought him no better than a common rabble rouser, a counterculture warrior with no substance.

Worst of all for Jack, the very people he wanted to love him, to embrace him as one of their own and hail him a great writer, scorned him, mocking his writing style. One writer,

Truman Capote, renowned for his novels In Cold Blood and Breakfast At Tiffany's went so far as to say that Jack's style "wasn't writing. That's typing."

Some critics praised his work, calling him a genius, stating it was what American literature needed, but others ripped him apart in cruel reviews which left him hurt and vulnerable.

Interviewers misquoted him or misrepresented him on purpose, not stating what he actually believed his work represented, what he meant to talk about in his books. To them, his fame and 'glory' if one wishes to call it that, was a way to make money, they cared little for his art or his ideas.

Due to this abuse from the literary community, the media, and the conservatives of American society, Jack threw himself into drinking to forget his troubles, slowly becoming an alcoholic.

Thanks to On The Road's commercial success Jack was able to publish many of his other novels, including the ones already listed here. He also published collections of poetry, Mexico City Blues in 1959 and Book of Dreams in 1960. He also wrote a collection of poems called The Scripture of the Golden Eternity based on the scriptures of Buddhism and how he understood them.

While Jack remained consistent in his writing, he slowly fell

into drinking daily and it hurt his writing output. His abuse of drugs didn't help, blocking his creative powers on several occasions, leaving him puzzled as before he could write fine.

But back then he was free of the stresses of fame. Free to write without worry about what the critics would think, how they would treat him in their reviews in the newspapers.

Jack was a sensitive man by all accounts, who took these attacks personally (as indeed many were directed at his person, not merely his work, coming across more as jealous attacks by writers outraged that someone they deemed beneath them in skill could become wealthy while they wrote in anonymity, their faces and names unrecognized).

Jack's quick rise to fame was followed by a swift decline, both in his physical and mental health, as well in his work. He wrote a great deal which went unpublished, including Wake up: A Life of The Buddha, where he gave his own understanding and perspective on Siddhartha Guatama's life and teachings, as well as many Haiku poems and other types of poetry, all of which were published in the years after his passing by his Estate.

In his later life, tired, beaten down by life, the harshness of his critics, and his alcoholism, face bloated from drink, Jack retired to St. Petersburgh, Florida with his mother. Here he married for the third and last time, to Stella Sampas, a

childhood friend and sister of his friend Sammy Sampas.

Stella, always in love with Jack since they were children, left Lowell to move in with the Kerouacs to help Jack care for Gabrielle. Many have said it was a marriage of convenience on Jack's part, and while there is some truth to that, he did care for her, loved her in his way.

In the late 60s the hippies and counterculture was in full swing, dozens of them holding Jack and his friends from the Beat Generation up as heroes and icons, but Jack wanted nothing to do with any of it.

To him the hippies, the communists, the anti American crowd (as he saw it) were what was wrong with society, not what would fix it. He scorned them, hated what they represented, and refused to align with them or let them use him or his books.

He was a proud American, first and foremost, his politics, in so far as he had any, leaned more conservative, and he detested the new liberal movements popping up which, in his eyes, wanted to rip America down from its roots and rebuild it in their own image, one which he saw as inferior.

In February of 1968, Jack received word that Neal Cassady had passed away. Neal, down in Mexico attending a friend's wedding, got high and drunk and later went outside without a

jacket on.

Stumbling along the railroad track, trying, people assume, to reach the next town for reasons only known to him, Neal fell into a ditch and passed out, rain and snow pelting down on him and all he had on was a T-shirt and blue jeans.

By the time people found him the next day he was in a coma. A few hours later he died in the hospital, he was forty one.

Neal's death hit Jack hard, furthering an already unsafe drinking habit, which took its toll on his liver.

By 1969, things were at an all time low for Kerouac, and he had no more time left to make things right.

On the morning of October 20th, while Jack sat at his desk working on a novel about his childhood memories of his father's print shop he became sick.

Rushing into the bathroom he started to vomit blood into the toilet. Horrified, he shouted Stella's name and she came running in, only to discover the toilet bowl and the floor surrounding it covered red.

Jack, always hating hospitals, refused at first to let her call an ambulance, but eventually gave in when it became apparent the blood wouldn't stop coming.

Rushed into St. Anthony's hospital, Jack threw up grey

stomach content and more blood as the doctors tried multiple blood transfusions to save his life, all the while he cried he didn't want to die.

When the blood transfusions failed they tried surgery, but it was too late. Jack, from years of hard drinking, damaged his liver beyond repair, causing severe internal bleeding.

He never regained consciousness following the surgery and died on the following morning, at the age of forty seven.

After Jack's death his body was taken back to Lowell where his funeral was held in the St. Jean Baptiste Church, presided over by Father Spike Morrissette, the same priest who served the community when Jack was still a teenager.

Following the service his remains were interred in Edson cemetery where up to this day his grave acts as a pilgrimage site for artists and admirers alike, coming to pay their respects to one of America's greatest writers. A man who lived life on his terms and who's passion for writing and art lives on through his many novels and collections of poems.